CHAPTER FOUR
Coherence and consistency in Europe's foreign policy

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> **Words strain,**
> **Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,**
> **Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,**
> **Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,**
> **Will not stay still.**
>
> T.S.Eliot, *The Four Quartets*

Words strain and sometimes break under the burden of their explicit or implicit meanings. The implications of two words in this article's title, coherence and consistency, assume startlingly huge proportions when properly understood in their EU context. For placing one over the other has the potential to signify entirely opposite visions for how Europe conceives of its place on the global stage. Ideology, political will and the prioritisation of various foreign policy philosophies – the devil, indeed, is in the detail.

Ask Fiona Black, head of the Jamaican Dairy Producers Association: "To what extent is EU agricultural policy coherent with its commitment to international development?" and her exasperate response tells the tale of poor country farmers' livelihoods devasted by the dumping of EU milk products in their market. Whole communities' economies wrecked and sustainable agricultural practices rendered unviable by EU subsidies that produce artificially cheap products benefiting a fraction of the under 5 per cent of Europe's population engaged in farming.

This article seeks to assess EU mechanisms for policy coherence in external relations. Debates over the future of the European Union are much preoccupied by the attempt to engineer coherence and consistency in EU actions. The split over the US-led war on Iraq in Spring 2003 brought European divisions into harsh focus; the nascent 'Common Foreign and Security Policy' reduced to something of a joke in the eyes of many. Yet attempts to engineer a more cohesive European Union in foreign policy risk opting for structural shake-ups

that may fail to resolve political differences at the heart of such 'incoherence'. Furthermore, institutional reform which purports to be technical may actually reflect a political change which downgrades credible development policies and institutions in the name of 'consistency'.

Origins of the coherence debate

Coherence was first introduced in the Maastricht Treaty, which stated that: "The Community shall take account of the objectives referred to in Article 130 U in the policies that it implements which are likely to affect developing countries."[1] Despite the weak wording ('take account of') the principle of coherence was explicitly pro-development: namely that other EU external policies should be 'coherent' with development commitments.[2] The Amsterdam Treaty introduced the concept of 'consistency' which emphasises that all EU external actions should be 'consistent' with the Common Foreign and Security Policy.[3] Stronger wording in early versions of that text indicated that development was to be subordinate to foreign policy.[4]

EU decision-making and development

The European Union probably has the most complex decision making system of any multilateral set of institutions. Fifteen Member State governments, civil services and parliaments, the European Parliament, the European Commission, special-interest groups and countless Courts, Committees and consultative bodies all input. Coherence of policies might be important in principle, but incoherence is often a given. Causes are manifold. In some cases it may constitute the best compromise, a balancing act, in which the relative importance of the actions and actors has been duly weighed.

Even in authoritarian regimes, government is never a unitary whole. In such a complex system policy incoherencies can easily appear. European Community development cooperation, the aid resources pooled at EC level, receives Member State oversight through various fora deciding on investments, political dialogue with developing countries and aid programmes. Member States are often accused of micro-management by committees and resolutions. It is clear that the paperwork from one side has relatively little influence on the other.[5]

European decision-making is particularly beleagured by competing national interests. Helen Wallace has suggested that there is an 'inherent instability' in European policy.[6] Considerable political differences across the EU make co-ordinated and coherent development policy based on shared principles difficult. This may increase as the EU enlarges; with new Member States bringing new regional priorities and technical approaches to the mix.

DECISION MAKING IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

RESOLUTION PRODUCING INSTITUTIONS

IMPLEMENTATION

(23 DGS)
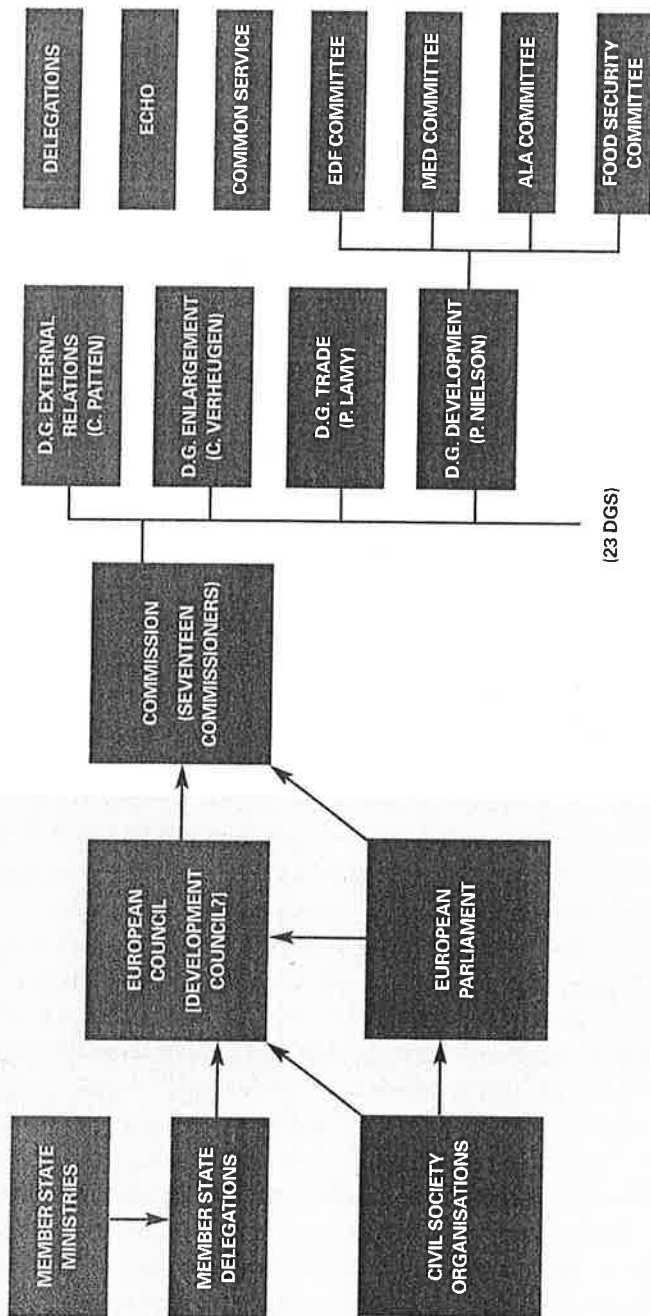
A brief history of EU mechanisms for coherence[7]

Following the Maastricht Treaty commitment to coherence, the Council of Development Ministers urged the European Commission to undertake a study of its practical implications. Two years later nothing had been produced.

First steps were the result of civil society pressure. In April 1993 NGOs started a campaign against artificially EU-subsidised meat exports being dumped in West Africa and disrupting the local meat markets.[8] The subsidies flagrantly undermined European aid projects in Sahel countries to encourage meat production. The incoherence between EU development and trade policy was a key criticism used by the NGOs. Eventually, pressure mounted from Member States and the European Commission was forced to publish a report admitting the incoherence and make adjustments to the subsidies. Soon afterwards the Netherlands proposed that a mechanism be adopted for identifying present and future problems of incoherence. Belgium proposed holding joint sessions of the Agriculture and Development Councils. Neither suggestion has yet been acted upon.

In February 2000 the Directorate General for Development circulated a first draft paper called 'Towards improved coherence between the Community development policy and other Community policies'. It contained a critical analysis of trade, agricultural, fisheries policies and the EC budget to assess where development policy could 'be affected or even contradicted'. Focusing aid on middle-income countries like Kosovo and Turkey was cited as an example of incoherence with poverty reduction commitments. The document called for a 'realistic and pragmatic approach'. The document went too far, was too critical and got buried without being published.

A watered-down Commission paper was published with the word 'coherence' substituted by 'consistency'. Little was achieved. The proposal for 'Focal Points for Policy Consistency' across the Commission was never implemented. Instead Directorates A and B in the Commission's DG Development monitor decisions in other DGs that impact on development. A 'Quality Support Group' within DG Development was installed in the early 1990s. It attempted to institute common project design and approval systems; such as through log-frame methods, streamlined financial procedures and budget lines.

In 2001 the EuropeAid Cooperation Office was established as the implementation agency for European aid. This followed three evaluations which had all criticised the weak institutional setting, red tape and time-consuming approval processes in the various DGs previously responsible for aid. Its main tasks are to improve the quality of project management, to reduce the time for project implementation, to improve financial procedures and to improve impact and visibility of European aid programmes. With more than 1,000 staff in 2002,

EuropeAid oversees 7.6 billion euro in more than 150 countries. The separation from policy formulation in DG External Relations, DG Development and DG Trade now constitutes the latest split in responsibility for development.

Since 2001, an 'Interservice Quality Support Group' (iQSG) has been established under Development Commissioner Nielson. It consists of twelve representatives from the different RELEX DGs and has its own secretariat. Its focus has been monitoring all Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) for EC aid recipient countries. Commission guidelines stipulate that CSPs should contain a coherence paragraph which identifies incoherencies and outlines the chosen policy mix. In principle this could be an important step. But until now insufficient research capacity has been invested. Furthermore no instruments have been implemented to monitor and evaluate the CSP analysis for a wider use in the Commission or Council.

Assessing the coherence mechanisms

The OECD provides a helpful analysis of the tools required for policy coherence: political leadership, strategic policy framework, central overview and coordination capacity, clear definition and good analysis, mechanisms to detect and resolve policy conflicts, reconciliation between policy priorities and budgetary imperatives, monitoring mechanisms and a conducive administrative culture.

Of all these, political leadership is most clearly lacking in the EU. Development cooperation is generally accorded only a junior ministerial portfolio in most EU Member States. Heads of state rarely get involved.

But let us be clear, leadership has also failed to come from the European Commission. When it came with documents, it came late and half-hearted. Thus coordination capacity and mechanisms were delayed and weak. DG Development proposals were watered down beyond credibility. More monitoring and analytical capacity and more research funds to evaluate the impact of EU policies will be crucial. Most importantly, a work culture which encourages staff to confront difficult and controversial coherence issues should be supported by EU leaders and the policy framework. At present strategic direction from the top is clearly lacking.

Coherence and/or consistency?

The cacaphony of voices that constitute Europe's presence on the global stage is doutless an embarrasment. Improving 'policy coherence' is a worthy aim for any politician. But we must ask ourselves: "Towards what ends?"

In a worrying trend, development policy and intruments are increasingly discussed as 'tools' for promoting Europe's 'strategic interests'. Coherence of

trade or security with pro-poor commitments was totally absent as a concept under the Convention on the Future of Europe. Indeed, Convention proposals re-interpreted 'coherence' as 'consistency': development subordinated to foreign policy. Ten years on and we are in danger of regressing, not progressing.

Key lessons learned include:

- The next EU Treaty must reaffirm the commitment to coherence of trade, agriculture, fisheries and security policies with development commitments.
- The Maastricht Treaty wording 'taking into account development policy' must be strengthened, not weakened or inverted.
- NGOs and progressive Member States must work together to hold the EU to account.
- Successful campaigns are based on concrete cases (meat, milk powder, fisheries).

1 Article 130 V of Title XVII of the Treaty on European Union, CEC/CEC, 1992:61
2 Article 130U (Article 177 in the Treaty of Amsterdam) is the first Article with relation to development co-operation in the Treaty of Maastricht. It sets out the general development objectives for the Community [CEC/CEC, 1992:61]
3 "The Union shall in particular ensure the consistency of its external activities as a whole in the context of its external relations, security, economic and development policies. The Council and the Commission shall be responsible for ensuring such consistency. They shall ensure the implementation of these policies, each in accordance with its respective powers."
4 In the Luxembourg version tabled in June 1991 the last part of the article still stated: "The Community and its Member States shall ensure that there development policies are consistent with the common foreign and security policy."
5 As was one of the conclusions of the Lomé, ALA and Med evaluations published in 1998. See for example: Montes, C./Migliorsi, S., Evaluation of European Union Aid to ACP countries. Synthesis Report. Brussels, November 1998.
6 "European policy regimes are conditional rather than definitive, a consequence of the continuing fluidity of the political setting of less than a policy, pulled between the political territories of the member states and the pressures of global and European influences." 1996:28
7 A more detailed version of this history is available from the BOND EU website: http://www.bond.org.uk/eu
8 A German study concluded that the meat exports of Mali and Burkina Faso in the period 1985-93 could have been 20–40 per cent higher if there had been no subsidised exports of frozen meat to Ivory Coast from the EU. See Brandt [1994]. Eurostep, 1993a; Eurostep, 1993b; Klugkist, 1993/1994

PROPOSED INSTRUMENTS TO FOSTER COHERENCE IN DEVELOPMENT POLICY

	INSTRUMENT	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
National Advisory Council (Netherlands)	Report annually to the EC Council and the European Parliament Complaints procedure/ Inspection Panel Screening test	• greater transparency and openness • greater transparency and openness • initiatives not solely by Commission and therefore wider-ranging • decisions would have to be weighed	• could be defensive and thus ritualistic • more paper work • needs investigative capacity • red tape • window dressing • sometimes difficult to be assessed
Solagral (French Research Institute)	Working group of civil servants of different DGs Group of experts for assessment studies	• decisions would have to be weighed • better assessments • solid weighing of decisions	• lack of transparency • purely bureaucratic • responsibilities unclear • could be symbolic • could involve unnecessary paperwork
Church Conference (Germany)	Regular consultations between European and ACP ministers System for assessment and evaluation	• greater transparency and openness • better assessments • solid weighing of decisions	• ritualistic/not transparent • no clear procedures • private initiative left out • no clear responsibilities • could be symbolic • could involve unnecessary paperwork
Government of Denmark	Discussions in Council	• developing set of indicators • discover unintentional concrete cases	• results unclear • behind closed doors, transparency lacking
Government of the Netherlands	Complaints procedure Commission Discussions in Council on food security/fisheries, conflict prevention, migration	• possibility to present incoherences • stimulating debate • discover unknown territories • transparency not secured	• investigative capacity lacking • results unclear • not leading to instruments/bureaucratic procedures
Eurostep	Impact Assessments Regular Reporting Joint Council meetings Coherence Office	• better insight in results • stimulate debate • better decision making	• could be ritualistic • much paperwork
First Nielson Proposal	Coherence Focal Points across the Commission	• autonomous analysis • data base • contact point	• depends on place in hierarchy
Second Nielson Proposal	Focal Point in DGDev	• detection of incoherences	• avoiding the real issues • not transparent
Government of the Netherlands	Discussions on coherence in every Council meeting	• stimulating debate	• could become ritualistic

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